Morgantown Green Team: Minutes of the March 7, 2016 Meeting

Attending:

Green Team: Holly Purpura (Friends of Decker's Creek and YTGG), Amanda Stoner (City Recycling Intern), Chelsi Baker (City Liaison, Communications), Jim Kotcon (Energy Committee), Karen Kalafat (Energy Committee), Pam Cubberly (Green Morgantown and YTGG), and Steven Woodruff.

Guests: Tom Arnold (City of Morgantown), Ella Belling (Mon River Trail Conservancy), Liz Wiles (Aurora Lights), Jim Probst (WV Citizen Climate Lobby), Doug Milbrand; Isabella Cross-Najafi, Bridget Hindman, and Marjorie Wolfe (plastic bag issue); Sean Kline, Brittney Watson, and James Mucci (WVU students); and Barry Lee Wendell.

I. New Business

A. Plastic bag issue. Isabella Cross-Najafi, Bridget Hindman, and Marjorie Wolfe attended the meeting specifically to ask advice on instituting a bag ban or fees in Morgantown, citing impacts in terms of litter, petroleum use in manufacture, and additions to landfills. They noted that other communities had imposed bans on plastic bag use by stores or begun charging for them. Some communities had avoided impacts on low-income folks through exceptions on fees for those participating in SNAP and other programs. They also suggested that funds raised through fees/charges could go to help the Morgantown library, for which residents will soon vote on a levy.

Isabella, Bridget, and Marjorie asked the Green Team for advice on how best to pursue action to reduce or ban plastic bag use. Comments from team members included the following points:

- It was more likely that action could be taken at the city than county level, but that would leave significant areas unaffected, such as Suncrest Towne Centre with its large Kroger store, as well as University Towne Center with its large box stores; and the second WalMart south of town. To be effective, several area communities (e.g., Morgantown, Westover, etc.) would need to join an initiative to ban or discourage plastic bag use.
- A bag fee would involve a number of logistical issues for businesses, such as how to collect fees raised that would then go to the library.
- Given current contentious environmental issues in West Virginia, opposition is likely, as it may be viewed as a tax, especially on low-income people. Is this the right year to push this issue?
- Such an effort would need funding and leadership to push through. The City of Morgantown may
 be more willing if the effort has backing from enough businesses. The new Green Business
 Council that Friends of Deckers Creek is trying to start could be one vehicle. Support from the
 Chamber of Commerce and Main Street Morgantown would clearly be helpful. This may be a
 long-term effort to get through.

The discussion also raised questions for more research: Do we know how grocery stores are currently recycling plastic bags that customers voluntarily put in bins at store sites? Do we know the plastic is

actually recycled? Are re-usable plastic bags (sold at many grocery stores) really better for the environment if they have to be disposed of eventually?

Team members recommended that Isabella, Bridget, and Marjorie get business support as a first priority; work out the logistics of what they propose, addressing the inevitable questions and obstacles that will be raised; reduce the impact on low-income folks; and perhaps develop a "white paper" on the topic that describes models adopted elsewhere and includes letters of support (e.g., from as many as 10 businesses) and a sample ordinance, if possible drafted by a lawyer; then they could come back to the team for discussion of next steps.

Discussion then turned to the challenges of moving the city, other municipalities, and the county forward on reducing the amount of waste disposed and increasing recycling of materials. See discussion under "Old Business."

- **B. Parks levy.** Ella Belling spoke about the urgent need to get the parks levy passed on May 10th through both actions by individual team members (e.g., helping with mailings as well as letters to the editor and other forums), as well as any action the Green Team thinks is appropriate. This raised the question on whether the Green Team could, for example, send a team letter to the *Dominion Post*. Chelsi Baker thought that the team had an independent status vis-à-vis the City of Morgantown and could take such an action (which she later corroborated with Jeff Mikorski). The topic will be discussed again at the April meeting.
- C. **Proposed "next generation" energy efficiency program.** Jim Kotcon, Pam Cubberly, and Karen Kalafat are researching opportunities for additional cost-effective energy efficiency measures by the city. Due to lack of time, discussion on this initiative was deferred to the April meeting.

II. Old Business

A. Recycling. The above discussion on plastic bags evolved into a general discussion of the difficulties of finding solutions to a variety of issues related to both trash and recycling.

Tom Arnold noted that there has been a stalemate among agencies/governments on working out recycling in the county at large. The city of Morgantown would like to expand recycling but it would help to be able to "pool resources" across a wider area, that is, including other communities in the area and the county at large where feasible. There is still a need for greater education on trash and recycling. Tom Arnold and Jeff Mikorski are exploring new opportunities to expand the number of residences participating in recycling. It would be helpful if the county's Solid Waste Authority was involved in such discussions again. It took a special working group involving key stakeholders some 6 years to get eventually to single-stream recycling in the city. If this working group could get together again, perhaps more progress could be made.

On the team's recycling initiative, Amanda Stoner said that, working with Jim Kotcon, she was drawing up a city recycling internship position description for distribution with a deadline of April 1st, so that her replacement could be selected soon and the two of them could work together for at least a few months before she goes abroad for the summer.

She also noted that she has the application for state funds for recycling education, whose deadline is July this year. (Amanda later sent out the draft internship description and a summary of the information needed for the application to Green Team members for comment. She asked the team for help in obtaining the information required. See appendix).

Action: It was suggested that Amanda Stoner and Tom Arnold work together to revive the previous city recycling working group, which would probably involve many of the same city and county folks that attended last fall's very productive community forum on recycling.

- **B.** Year to Go Green. Due to lack of time, a report on progress of the Year to Go Green was deferred to the April meeting.
- **III.** The meeting concluded at 7:00pm, followed by a special presentation on the Citizen's Climate Lobby by Jim Probst of Charleston, WV, which attracted a group of 15–20 people.

Next meeting: April 4, 5:30 pm-7:00 pm, in Morgantown City Hall at 389 Spruce Street.